

## A BOY I KNEW.

BY LAURENCE HUTTON.

*[This series was begun in the December number.]*

### IV.



**W**HEN The Boy got as far as a room of his own, papered with scenes from circus-posters, and peopled by tin soldiers, he used to play that his bed was the barge "Mayflower," running from

Barrytown to the foot of Jay Street, North River, and that he was her captain and crew. She made nightly trips between the two ports; and by day, when she was not tied up to the door-knob — which was Barrytown — she was moored to the handle of the washstand drawer — which was the dock at New York. She never was wrecked, and she never ran aground; but great was the excitement of The Boy when, as not infrequently was the case, on occasions of sweeping, Hannah, the upstairs girl, set her adrift.

The Mayflower was seriously damaged by fire once, owing to the careless use, by a deck-hand, of a piece of punk on the night before the Fourth of July; this same deck-hand being nearly blown up early the very next morning by a bunch of firecrackers which went off — by themselves — in his lap. He did not know, for a second or two, whether the barge had burst her boiler or had been struck by lightning!

Barrytown is the river port of Red Hook — a charming Dutchess County hamlet in which The Boy spent the first summer of his life, and in which he spent the better part of every succeeding summer for a quarter of a century; and he sometimes goes there yet, although many of the names he knows were carved, in the long-ago, on the tomb. He always went up and down, in those days, on the Mayflower, the real boat of that name, which was hardly more real

to him than was the trundle-bed of his vivid, nightly imagination. They sailed from New York at five o'clock, P. M., an hour looked for, and longed for, by The Boy, as the very beginning of summer, with all its delightful young charms; and they arrived at their destination about five of the clock the next morning, by which time The Boy was wide awake, and on the lookout for Lasher's Stage, in which he was to travel the intervening three miles. And eagerly he recognized, and loved, every landmark on the road. Barringer's Corner, the half-way tree; the road to the creek and to Madame Knox's; and, at last, the village itself, and the tavern, and the tobacco-factory, and Massoneau's store, over the way; and then, when Jane Purdy had shown him the new kittens and the little chickens, and he had talked to "Fido" and "Fanny," or to Fido alone after Fanny was stolen by gypsies, he rushed off to see Bob Hendricks, who was just his own age, barring a week, and who has been his life-long friend for fifty-three years and nearly six months; and then what good times The Boy had!

Bob was possessed of a grandfather who could make kites, and swings, and parallel-bars, and things which The Boy liked; and Bob had a mother — and he has her yet, happy Bob! — who made the most wonderful of cookies, perfectly round, with sparkling globules of sugar on them, and little round holes in the middle; and Bob and The Boy for days, and weeks, and months together hen's-egged, and rode in the hay-carts, and went for the mail every noon, and boosted each other up into the best pound-sweet tree in the neighborhood; and pelted each other with little green apples, which weighed about a pound to the peck; and gathered currants in season; and with long straws sucked new cider out of bung-holes; and learned to swim; and caught their first fish; and did all the pleasant things that all boys do.

At Red Hook they smoked their first cigar,—and wished they had n't! At Red Hook they disobeyed their mothers once, and were found out. They were told not to go wading in the creek upon pain of not going to the creek at



BOB HENDRICKS.

all; and for weeks they were deprived of the delights of the society of the Faure boys, through whose domain the creek ran, because, when they went to bed on that disastrous night, it was discovered that Bob had on The Boy's stockings, and that

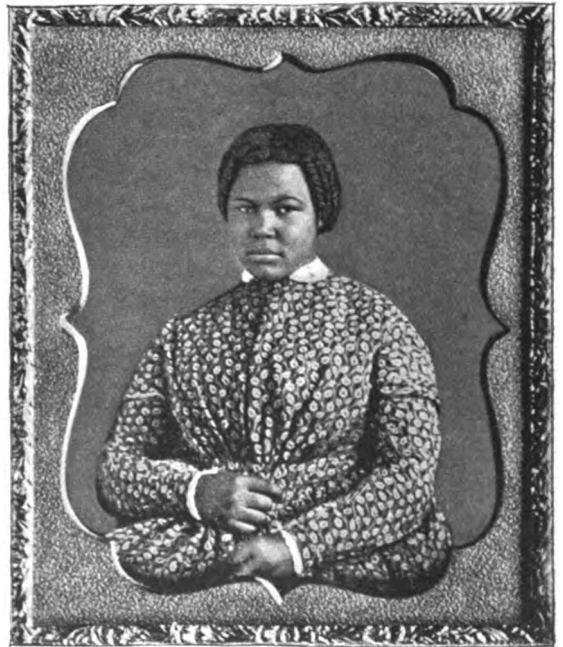
The Boy was wearing Bob's socks; a piece of circumstantial evidence which convicted them both. When the embargo was raised and they next went to the creek, it is remembered that Bob tore his trousers in climbing over a log, and that The Boy fell in altogether.

The Boy usually kept his promises, however, and he was known even to keep a candy-cane—twenty-eight inches long, red and white striped like a barber's pole—for a fortnight, because his mother limited him to the consumption of two inches a day. But he could not keep any knees to his trousers; and when The Boy's mother threatened to sew buttons—brass buttons, with sharp eyes—on to that particular portion of the garment in question, he wanted to know, in all innocence, how they expected him to say his prayers!

One of Bob's earliest recollections of The Boy is connected with a toy express-wagon on four wheels, which could almost turn around on its own axis. The Boy imported this vehicle into Red Hook one summer, and they used it for the transportation of their chestnuts and their apples, green and ripe, and the mail, and most of the dust of the road; and Bob thinks, to this day, that nothing in all these after years has given him so much profound satisfaction and enjoyment as did that little cart.

Bob remembers, too,—what The Boy tries to forget,—The Boy's daily practice of half an hour on the piano borrowed by The Boy's mother from Mrs. Bates for that dire purpose. Mrs. Bates's piano is almost the only unpleasant thing associated with Red Hook in all The Boy's experience of that happy village. It was pretty hard on The Boy, because, in The Boy's mind, Red Hook should have been a place of unbroken delights. But The Boy's mother wanted to make an all-round man of him, and when his mother said so, of course it had to be done, or tried. Bob used to go with The Boy as far as Dr. Bates's house, and then hang about on the gate until The Boy was released; and he asserts that the music which came out of the window in response to The Boy's in-harmonic touch had no power whatever to soothe his own savage young breast. He attributes all his later disinclination to music to those dreary thirty minutes of impatient waiting.

The piano and its effect upon The Boy's uncertain temper *may* have been the innocent



JANE PURDY.

cause of the first and only approach to a quarrel which The Boy and Bob ever had. The prime cause, however, was, of course, a

girl. They were playing, that afternoon, at Cholwell Knox's, when Cholwell said something about Julia Booth which Bob resented, and there was a fight, The Boy taking Cholwell's part; why, he cannot say, unless it was because of his jealousy of Bob's affection and admiration for that charming young teacher, who won all hearts in the village, The Boy's



THE BOY'S UNCLE JOHN.

among the number. Anyway, Bob was driven from the field by the hard little green apples of the Knox orchard; more hurt, he declares, by the desertion of his ally than by all the blows he received.

It never happened again, dear Bob, and, please God, it never will!

Another trouble The Boy had in Red Hook was Dr. McNamee, a resident dentist, who operated upon The Boy now and then. He was a little more gentle than was The Boy's city dentist, Dr. Castle; but he hurt, for all that. Dr. Castle lived in Fourth Street, opposite Washington Parade Ground, and on the same block with Clarke and Fanning's School. And to this day The Boy would go far out of his way rather than pass Dr. Castle's house. Personally Dr. Castle was a delightful man, who told The Boy amusing stories, which The Boy could not laugh at while his mouth was wide open. But professionally Dr. Castle was to The Boy an awful horror, of whom he always dreamed when his dreams were particularly bad. As he looks back upon his boyhood,

with its frequent toothache and its long hours in the dentists' chairs, The Boy sometimes thinks that if he had his life to live over again, and could not go through it without teeth, he would prefer not to be born at all!

It has rather amused The Boy, in his middle age, to learn of the impressions he made upon Red Hook in his extreme youth. Bob, as has been shown, associates him with a little cart, and with a good part of the concord of sweet sounds. One old friend remembers nothing but his phenomenal capacity for the consumption of chicken pot-pie. Another old friend can recall the scrupulously clean white duck suits he wore of afternoons, and also the blue-checked long aprons he was forced to wear in the mornings; both of them exceedingly distasteful to The Boy, because the apron was a girl's garment, and because the duck-suit meant "dress-up," and only the mildest of genteel play; while Bob's sister dwells chiefly now upon a wonderful valentine The Boy sent once to Zillah Crane. It was so large that it had to have an especial envelope made to fit it; and it was so magnificent, and so delicate, that notwithstanding the envelope, it came in a box of its own. It had actual lace, and pinkish Cupids reclining on light-blue clouds; and in the center of all was a compressible bird-cage, which, when it was pulled out, like an accordion, displayed not a dove merely, but a plain gold ring—a real ring, made of real gold. Nothing like it had ever been seen before in all Dutchess County; and it was seen and envied by every girl of Zillah's age between Rhinebeck and Tivoli, between Barrytown and Pine Plains.

The Boy did an extensive business in the valentine line, in the days when February Fourteenth meant much more to boys than it does now. He sent sentimental valentines to Phoebe Hawkins, and comic valentines to his Uncle John, both of them written anonymously, and both directed in a disguised hand. But both recipients always knew from whom they came; and, in all probability, neither of them was much affected by the receipt. The Boy, as he has put on record elsewhere, never really, in his inmost heart, thought that comic valentines were so very comic, because those that came to him usually reflected upon his nose, or were illum-

inated with portraits of gentlemen of all ages adorned with supernaturally red hair.

In later years, when Bob and The Boy could swim — a little — and had learned to take care of themselves, the mill-pond at Red Hook played an important part in their daily life there. They sailed it, and fished it, and camped out on its banks, with Ed Curtis — before Ed went to West Point — and with Dick Hawley and Frank Rodgers, all first-rate fellows. But, as Mr. Kipling says, that is another story.

The Boy was asked, a year or two ago, to write a paper upon "The Books of his Boyhood." And when he came to think over the matter he discovered, to his surprise, that the Books of his Boyhood were only one book! It was bound in two twelvemo green cloth volumes; it bore the date of 1850, and it was filled with pictorial illustrations of "The Personal History and Experiences of David Copperfield, the Younger." It was the first book The Boy ever read, and he thought then, and sometimes he thinks now, that it was the greatest book ever written. The traditional books of the childhood of other children came to The Boy later. "Robinson Crusoe," and the celebrated "Swiss Family" of the same name; "The Desert Home," of Mayne Reid; Marryat's "Peter Simple"; "The Leather Stocking Tales"; "Rob Roy"; "The Three Guardsmen" were well thumbed and well liked; but they were not The Boy's first love in fiction, and they never usurped, in his affections, the place of the true account of David Copperfield. It was a queer book to have absorbed the time and attention of a boy of eight or nine, who had to skip the big words, who did not understand it all, but who cried, as he has cried but once since, whenever he came to that dreadful chapter which tells the story of the taking away of David's mother, and of David's utter, hopeless desolation over his loss.

How the book came into The Boy's possession he cannot now remember, nor is he sure that his parents realized how much, or how often, he was engrossed in its contents. It cheered him in the measles, it comforted him in the mumps. He took it to school with him, and he took it to bed with him; and he read it, over and over again, especially the early chap-

ters; for he did not care so much for David after David became Trotwood, and fell in love.

When, in 1852, after his grandfather's death, he first saw London, it was not the London of the Romans, the Saxons, or the Normans, nor the London of the Plantagenets or the Tudors, but the London of the Micawbers and the Traddleses, the London of Murdstone and Grinby, the London of Dora's Aunt and of "Jip." On his arrival at Euston Station the first object upon which his eyes fell was a donkey-cart, a large wooden tray on wheels, driven, at a rapid pace, by a long-legged young man, and followed, at a pace hardly so rapid, by a boy of about his own age, who seemed in great mental distress. This was the opening scene. And London, from that moment, became to him, and still remains, a great moving panorama of David Copperfield.

The Boy never walked along the streets of London by his father's side during that memorable summer without meeting in fancy some friend of David's, without passing some spot that David knew, and loved, or hated. And he recognized St. Paul's Cathedral at the first glance, because it had figured as an illustration on the cover of Peggotty's work-box!

This was the Book of The Boy's Boyhood. He does not recommend it as the exclusive literature of their boyhood to other boys; but out of it The Boy knows that he got nothing but what was healthful and helping. It taught him to abominate selfish brutality and sneaking falsehood, as they were exhibited in the Murdstones and the Heeps; it taught him to avoid rash expenditure as it was practiced by the Micawbers; it showed him that a man like Steerforth might be the best of good fellows and at the same time the worst and most dangerous of companions; it showed, on the other hand, that true friends like Traddles are worth having and worth keeping; it introduced him to the devoted, sisterly affection of a woman like Agnes; and it proved to him that the rough pea-jacket of a man like Ham Peggotty might cover the simple heart of as honest a gentleman as ever lived.

The Boy, in his time, has been brought in contact with many famous men and women,

but upon nothing in his whole experience does he look back with greater satisfaction than upon his slight intercourse with the first great man he ever knew. Quite a little lad, he was staying at the Pulaski House in Savannah, in 1853 — perhaps it was in 1855 — when his father told him to observe particularly the old gentleman, with the spectacles, who occupied a seat at their table in the public dining-room; for, he said, the time would come when The Boy would be very proud to say that he had breakfasted, and dined, and supped with Mr. Thackeray. He had no idea who, or what, Mr. Thackeray was; but his father considered him a great man, and that was enough for The Boy. He did pay particular attention to Mr. Thack-

eray, with his eyes and his ears; and one morning Mr. Thackeray paid a little attention to him, of which he is proud, indeed. Mr. Thackeray took The Boy between his knees, and asked his name, and what he intended to be when he grew up. He replied, "A farmer, sir." Why, he cannot imagine, for he never had the slightest inclination toward a farmer's life. And then Mr. Thackeray put his gentle hand upon The Boy's little red head, and said: "Whatever you are, try to be a good one."

If there is any virtue in the laying-on of hands The Boy can only hope that a little of it has descended upon him.

And whatever The Boy is, he has tried, for Thackeray's sake, "to be a good one!"

THE END.



THACKERAY'S ADVICE TO THE BOY: "‘WHATEVER YOU ARE, TRY TO BE A GOOD ONE.’"